

CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
SPECIAL CITY COUNCIL MEETING
MONDAY, MAY 12, 2014

7:00 PM

ATTENDANCE: Council members: Brannelly, Torres, Banta, Taylor-Moye, Swain, McCarthy, Austin, Lyons, Vizzo-Paniccia, McBride-Lee, Salter, DeJesus, Castillo, Martinez, Feliciano, Marella, Paoletto, Martinez-Walker, Holloway

ABSENT: Council member: Halstead

Mayor Finch called the meeting to order at 7:15 pm.

Prayer - Council member Banta offered the prayer.

Moment of Silence

Mayor Finch asked for a moment of silence for Bob Keeley Sr., who recently passed away. He was a long time member of the police department

Pledge of Allegiance - Council member DeJesus led the pledge of allegiance.

Roll Call - the City Clerk took the roll call and announced there was a quorum.

Council President McCarthy stated there were some technical areas to cover after taking up item **83-13** Budget & Appropriations Committee Report re: Resolution concerning the Implementation of the Revaluation for the October 2013 Assessment Year.

He explained that the council would discuss the item and then vote on it; if the item is approved, they will take a brief recess directly after the vote to give the Assistant City Clerk the chance to clock in the item and bring it back for the Mayor to sign. He relayed that they couldn't vote on the budget until the item was approved. It was further noted that all council members should see the Assistant City Clerk to sign their reports.

83-13 Budget & Appropriations Committee Report re: Resolution concerning the Implementation of the Revaluation for the October 2013 Assessment Year

**** COUNCIL PRESIDENT MOVED TO APPROVE**
**** COUNCIL MEMBER MARELLA SECONDED**

A roll call vote was requested and taken:

**** MOTION PASSED WITH SIXTEEN VOTES IN FAVOR AND THREE VOTES IN OPPOSITION (COUNCIL MEMBERS: TORRES, SALTER, HOLLOWAY)**

Mayor Finch thanked the delegation from Hartford. He mentioned that economic development is poised over the next, noting that the legislature advocated for the revaluation and the City of Bridgeport supported it due to being a heavily targeted city for sub-prime loans related to foreclosures.

Council member Holloway stated that during his time serving on the council for twenty plus years, at the end of the day and next year when they don't vote for the revaluation; he questioned what will happen and why taxes might go up fifty or sixty percent. He stated that he didn't believe in revaluation.

Council member Lyons stated that the matter was inevitable. However, the state agreed it was the right choice, it was discussed and she assumed they were made the right choice.

**** COUNCIL PRESIDENT McCARTHY MOVED TO RECESS FOR 10-MINUTES**
**** COUNCIL MEMBER PAOLETTO SECONDED**
**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

Mayor Finch recessed the meeting at 7:20 pm.

Mayor Finch reconvened the meeting at 7:30 pm.

Mayor Finch announced that there would be five (5) separate votes for the budget approval:

66-13 Budget and Appropriations Committee Report re: General Fund Budget for
a,b,c,d,e Fiscal Year 2014-2015 – Votes as follows:

General Fund:

- a. Revenue Increases
- b. Revenue Decreases
- c. Appropriation Increases
- d. Appropriation Decreases
- e. General Fund Budget Fiscal Year 2014-2015 as amended

Council member Brannelly thanked the entire city council for the revised budget that was brought forth. She recalled that there were many long and tedious nights attending meetings. She further thanked Tom Sherwood for his efforts and for providing the information and documentation. She went on to speak to the efforts that were put forth, noting that when the budget process began, there was a .79 mill rate increase proposed. She stated that through committee efforts and the state; they were able to reduce the mill rate to .3384 that equates to \$54.00 per year per household; \$134.00 per year for City of Bridgeport

City Council Special Meeting

May 12, 2014

Page 2 of 6

commercial and \$49.00 on average for commercial property tax. She relayed that as they see the resolution, they will put into place the .3384 mill rate increase and vote the budget as it was submitted. She clarified that if the recommended budget by the council isn't approved and they vote no, it will result in a tax increase. She further mentioned that an audit of unused line items is still in effect and will be implemented in the near future.

She went on to review the following and stated that they saw unfunded mandates that the city council had no control over. They asked the state or federal delegation to work towards creating a more friendly environment to the city to address matters such as regionalization and they are going to ask the state delegation to help them get a change in motion for that. They will also ask to address the unfair method of taxing all properties that have a small footprint and to offer some relief that more fairly spreads out the burden of the taxpayer. They will also address the fair share of posting as it pertains to colleges and universities.

Council member Brannelly noted additional items that will be closely looked at to increase no-tax base revenue:

- Charges for transportation
- Parking meter overhaul
- Recycling fees
- Education as it relates to employees and students
- The benefits of making the city more green
- Car registrations
- Non-compliance building permits

She spoke about the education debate, noting that most of their time was spent trying to determine what the city's obligation was. And in the end, the budget committee agreed that the agreement between the state, the Department of Education, the City of Bridgeport and the Bridgeport Board of Education fulfilled the obligation as one-third of the party to the agreement and they identified that the issue needs to be fixed. She relayed that the infrastructure that's planned needs to be in place before July 1, but she didn't think that it would happen in that timeline, so there was a consensus that planning for it would be irresponsible.

She thanked Council member Marella, Council President McCarthy, the Budget & Appropriations Committee and all other council members for all their efforts. She emphasized that they didn't cut any services, because the committee thought it was very, very important not to do that.

Mayor Finch expressed that the committee did a great job with the budget under difficult circumstances.

Council member Torres read a statement into the record as follows:

This year's budget work was educational. The work of Tom Sherwood in this process provided insight to many things I did not understand, but sadly, also to the reality that Tom works for the mayor and as such is not obligated to help us find any savings to the budget.

So taxes go up again to the most tax-burdened city in America and it is our hand that raises them.

One of the relatively obnoxious areas which I observed in this process is the lack of consistency of the reporting process of the city. From last year to this year, we lost the unfilled employee column in the budget. It just disappeared. It doesn't mean that there are no vacancies, but that it is none of anyone's business, especially the public that might want to know.

Honest consistent information is key to doing a good job of oversight. Our information is presented to give best light to what the mayor wants, not to the process of transparency. An example of this is the Lighthouse Program. Although, productive, they do have a revenue stream that is invisible to the council. This year they report in the provided notes some \$375,000 which is absent from the revenue area.

This leads me to the area of Grants. Bridgeport actually manages some \$650,000,000 and not the \$522,000,000 we think we manage. Who oversees the grants? Not that I think we could perform any better in oversight with that than we do with the regular budget, but it would still be nice to understand how someone else is spending the other \$130,000,000.

Another area is our desire to keep a "legislative" department in existence. The truth is that we want to indiscriminately spend taxpayer dollars. We should have cut our department by 80%. A better idea is to replace the legislative aide. Preferably a productive, knowledgeable person that could assist us in finding the truth in this maze called Bridgeport.

Another is how we dealt with the revaluation. Long after the fact, we approved the action, even though all of the necessary evidence was long-ago shredded. What if we rejected the idea? What would the city do? They eliminated the data. The data still exists, I'm told, but it is not here and not available to be seen. To get it, the mayor has to ask Vision, but he won't. But we spend \$300,000 on the effort. If we saw the data we would discover that the Grant List declined. This would have led to a higher mill rate and a reduction in taxes for the city's poor areas. However much I want my taxes and those of my representative area to go down, I don't wish to be unfair to the poorer folks in the city.

This is the extent to which I will occupy your time. I will vote against all spending increases and revenue increases. I would have voted for zero tax increase budget.

Respectfully yours,

Enrique Torres

Council member Holloway stated that over the last two years serving on the council, he recalled that the early years during the 1990's houses burned down because residents couldn't pay their taxes and taxes are much higher now. As far as the Board of Education, he recalled that they had a surplus to raise money and then at the end of the year they purchased new equipment so they could end the year and spend all the monies. He said

he believed that the board needs more money. He commented that residents in Bridgeport can't afford an increase in taxes and the revaluation will raise taxes sky high. As for the non-profits that come through the city and don't pay any taxes, the issue is that the City of Bridgeport can tell them what's allowed. He stated that residents in the 139th District complain every day about a yellow sticker that is put on their door and being fined for trash in their backyard. He stressed that there has to be a way to tell that the city is double taxing individuals just because of some trash in the backyard. He emphasized that you can't double tax individuals, but if the purpose is to make the city clean, then it should be cleaned up. He questioned why they should make residents pay when they can't afford it. He mentioned that houses are being burned down every day because people can't pay their taxes and the city council and administration should come together to help residents with the exorbitant amount of taxes.

Council President McCarthy reiterated that there is a situation with property taxes in the State of Connecticut, noting that high taxes in a poor city are unfair and unconstitutional. He commended Council member Brannelly and Council member Marella for overseeing the numerous budget meetings. He relayed that they are still finding ways to help taxpayers and relieve some of the burden. He applauded the Budget & Appropriations Committee for all their efforts that resulted in as good a budget as possible. He commented that he will be proud of those who will vote yes, noting that it will be just as hard to vote no.

Mayor Finch requested a motion to approve the following budget items:

66-13 a. Revenue Increases \$2,912,621.00

**** COUNCIL MEMBER BRANNELLY MOVED TO APPROVE
** COUNCIL PRESIDENT McCARTHY SECONDED
** MOTION PASSED WITH EIGHTEEN VOTES IN FAVOR AND ONE VOTE IN
OPPOSITION (COUNCIL MEMBER TORRES)**

66-13 b. Revenue Decreases \$-3,060,929.00

**** COUNCIL MEMBER BRANNELLY MOVED TO APPROVE
** COUNCIL PRESIDENT MARELLA SECONDED
** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

66-13 c. Appropriation Increases \$-9,569,440.00

**** COUNCIL MEMBER BRANNELLY MOVED TO APPROVE
** COUNCIL PRESIDENT MARELLA SECONDED
** MOTION PASSED WITH SIXTEEN VOTES IN FAVOR AND THREE VOTES IN
OPPOSITION (COUNCIL MEMBERS: TORRES, LYONS, McBRIDE-LEE)**

66-13 d. Appropriation Decreases \$9,717,748.00

**** COUNCIL MEMBER BRANNELLY MOVED TO APPROVE
** COUNCIL PRESIDENT MARELLA SECONDED
** MOTION PASSED WITH SEVENTEEN VOTES IN FAVOR AND TWO VOTES IN
OPPOSITION (COUNCIL MEMBERS: TORRES, LYONS)**

66-13 e. General Fund Budget Fiscal Year 2014-2015 as amended

**** COUNCIL MEMBER BRANNELLY MOVED TO APPROVE
** COUNCIL PRESIDENT MARELLA SECONDED
** MOTION PASSED WITH FIFTEEN VOTES IN FAVOR AND FOUR VOTES IN
OPPOSITION (COUNCIL MEMBERS: TORRES, LYONS, McBRIDE-LEE,
DeJESUS)**

Council President McCarthy congratulated the council members for voting yes to the budget.

Announcement – Council President McCarthy announced that the City Council meeting scheduled for Tuesday, May 13, 2014 was cancelled.

ADJOURNMENT

**** COUNCIL PRESIDENT McCARTHY MOVED TO ADJOURN
** COUNCIL MEMBER PAOLETTO SECONDED
** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

The meeting adjourned at 7:45 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Diane Graham
Telesco Secretarial Services